

SELFRIDGE FIELD, BUILDING No. 116
(Electrical Switching Station)
Birch Avenue at Railroad Street
Mt. Clemens vicinity
Macomb County
Michigan

HAER No. MI-116-B

HAER
MICH
50-MTCLE.V
IB-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Great Lakes Systems Office
Department of the Interior
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68108-2571

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SELFRIDGE FIELD, HAER No. MI-116-B
BUILDING #116 (ELECTRICAL SWITCHING STATION)

Location: Railroad Avenue at Birch Street
Selfridge Air National Guard Base

U.S.G.S. Mount Clemens East Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.350840.4718920

Significance: This building represents the functional structures of the Cantonment district, permanent base construction initiated during the late 1920s and early 1930s that was designed to complement the Georgian Revival architecture of the adjacent non-commissioned and commissioned officers' housing neighborhood.

Description: This building is a rectangular plan, 11 foot by x 18 foot single story, flat-roofed common bond brick structure resting on a concrete raised foundation. It is distinguished by its corbelled brick corner quoins, brick arched window and door hoods and a simple, cast concrete frieze.

The three bays of the facade (east elevation) are defined by a central pedestrian steel entry door and flanking steel mesh covered windows. The central entry door displays a round arch, double rowlock transom distinguished by cast concrete stringers and a central keystone. The single rowlock round arched windows on each side of the door reveal keystone brick lintels and concrete sills. Glass blocks have replaced the original six-over-six lighted windows. A simple unadorned cast concrete frieze is capped by tile coping, while the building corners display brick corner quoins and the raised concrete foundation creates a water table.

The side (north and south) elevations are identical, continuing the unornamented frieze and tile coping, corner quoins and concrete water table. The fenestration of each consists of a centrally placed round arch window with concrete sill and glass block lights. The three bay rear (west) elevation is identical to the facade except for the absence of the coped frieze and presence of a copper eave gutter. The electrical switching equipment that occupied the fenced compound extending from the south elevation has been removed.

The interior of the building is divided into two rooms, the seven-

foot-wide Switchboard Room, which takes up a majority of the interior space and the four-foot-wide Transistor Room, which occupies the remainder. Interior electrical components were designed and installed by the Detroit Edison Company. The floor plan has remained unaltered although the functional components have been removed.

History:

This electrical switching station was constructed in 1935 from plans provided by the Selfridge Field Office of the Construction Division of the Quartermaster General, with station components designed by the Detroit Edison Company. After it ceased to service the base electrical grid in the 1980s, its electrical components were removed and it serves today as a parts store room for base electrical support.

The Cantonment district is unified by its historical frame of reference, with all buildings being built within a 7 year period between 1927 and 1934. These buildings replaced the frame, temporary buildings that were the hallmark of the original Selfridge Field, dating to ca. 1917 to 1918. Stylistically, all are substantial architect-designed buildings executed in a brick medium. All but the most functional structures display strong references to the Georgian Revival style in massing and in elements such as arched windows, quoins, and classical pediments.

This complex of buildings was built at the core of the original Selfridge Field and today is still the most distinctive cluster of architecture on base. The brick structures present today form a consistent entity of Georgian Revival architecture in the residential housing and duplexes (#220s to #250s series), and the administrative and support facilities (#300 to #350 and #3 to #140 series). It includes hangars, officers housing, barracks, squadron operations/control tower, specialized buildings such as the fire station, a parachute house and other maintenance and support facilities.

Buildings in the Cantonment area played a significant part in Selfridge's role as a training base during the war. The base expanded outward spatially and the number of base structures mushroomed rapidly during the war. Although most of the new

buildings were constructed in the base's newly acquired zones, a number were erected in proximity to the Cantonment core. Still, the Cantonment District provided a structural, functional, and stylistic anchor for the base.

The architectural and functional "core" of Selfridge, the original base, constructed prior to World War II, presents a unique resource in Michigan. Few airfields that were exclusively military in genesis were built in the state and Selfridge is the oldest and best preserved example of its type. The concentration of brick structures built in the cantonment area of the base from the mid-1920s into the early 1930s form a cohesive assemblage.

Sources:

Anonymous, Brief History of Selfridge Air Force Base, 1917-1960. Unpublished ms., Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1960.

_____, Guide and Directory, Selfridge Air Force Base. Selfridge Air Force Base, Michigan, 1960.

Mihalak, Joseph, Evolution of Family Housing Selfridge Air National Guard Base Mount Clemens, Michigan, Historical Office, US Army Tank-Automotive Command, 20, January, 1988.

Nigro, Louis, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, An Unofficial History, unpublished ms., Public Information Office, Selfridge ANG Base, Michigan, 1977.

Copy of construction drawing, dated May 23, 1935, Selfridge Field Office of the Construction Division of the Quartermaster General, in possession of Selfridge Base Museum, Mt. Clemens, Michigan. Plans, Elevations, Details, Drawing No. 6638-428.

Photographic copy of construction drawing, dated September 20, 1935, Detroit Edison Company for Office of the Quartermaster Selfridge Field, in possession of Selfridge Base Museum, Mt. Clemens, Michigan. Transformer Sections A-A, D-D, Drawing 2641-1.

Interview, Colonel Robert Stone (ret.), curator, Selfridge Base

Selfridge Field
Building #116
(Electrical Switching Station)
HAER No. MI-116-B
Page 4

Museum, October 13, 1995.

Interview, Eric Reeve, Selfridge Environmental Management,
October 12, 1995.

Historian:

William E. Rutter
Midwest Environmental Consultants, Inc.
May, 1996